

Message Text

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ACTION SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5588

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 9803

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR SGEN CO

SUBJ: FY 1976 PEACE CORPS PROGRAM

REF: STATE 236947

1. COLOMBIA IS IN GRIP OF AN UNPRECEDENTED INFLATION AND PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS LAUNCHED AN AUSTERITY PROGRAM WHICH HAS RESULTED IN THE CANCELLATION OF MANY ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS FORMERLY CONSIDERED IMPORTANT TO THIS COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT.

2. REQUESTED RESPONSES ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A) IT IS VERY LIKELY THAT COLOMBIA WOULD REACT TO ANY REQUEST THAT IT INCREASE ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE PEACE CORPS BY REQUESTING THE PEACE CORPS TO PHASE OUT GRADUALLY ITS ACTIVITIES. IN CERTAIN ISOLATED CASES A POSITIVE RESPONSE MIGHT BE FORTHCOMING BUT OVERALL THE RESPONSE WOULD BE NEGATIVE.

B) COLOMBIA ALREADY CONTRIBUTES SOMETHING ON THE ORDER OF \$20,000 A YEAR IN CASH AND \$80,000 IN KIND TO THE PC. WE WOULD NOT ANTICIPATE THAT A REQUEST FOR INCREASED SUPPORT WOULD RESULT IN ANY IMMEDIATE CUTOFF OF ALL SUPPORT.

C) NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT TO US INTERESTS IS SEEN SHOULD THE PEACE CORPS PROGRAM BE TERMINATED UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES NOTED. THOSE CONCERNED WITH BRINGING DEVELOPMENTAL EFFORTS TO THE PEOPLE WOULD MISS THE INPUT OF THE VOLUNTEERS BUT WE DO NOT FORESEE
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ANY IMPORTANT GOVT-TO-GOVT PROBLEMS ARISING FROM PC DEPARTURE.

D) AID DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES IN COLOMBIA ARE IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE. AID'S FUTURE CONTRIBUTION WILL PROBABLY BE IN THE AREA OF HIGH TECHNOLOGY INPUTS AND THUS THE ABSENCE OF PC WOULD HAVE VERY LITTLE EFFECT ON ITS PROGRAM.

E) COLOMBIA'S CHOICE WOULD BE TO PHASE DOWN THE CURRENT LEVEL OF ACTIVITY RATHER THAN INCREASE ITS CONTRIBUTION.

3. COMMENT. I WOULD POINT OUT THAT THE PEACE CORPS PRESENCE IN COLOMBIA HELPS PRIMARILY THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE INFLUENCE WITH THE GOVERNMENT OR ACCESS TO THE MEDIA. THEREFORE ANY DECISION TO PHASE DOWN OR OUT WILL HAVE MINIMAL IMPACT ON THOSE WHO MAKE DECISIONS IN THIS COUNTRY. THIS DOES NOT MEAN, HOWEVER, THAT THE PEACE CORPS' CONTRIBUTION IS NOT IMPORTANT OR APPRECIATED. WE BELIEVE IT TO BE BOTH. UNFORTUNATELY IN THE SITUATION DESCRIBED REFTEL ALL THAT IS NEEDED FOR THE PC TO DIMINISH OR DISAPPEAR FROM THE SCENE IS FOR THOSE IN POWER NOT TO MAKE A POSITIVE DECISION AND THIS IS OF COURSE THE EASIEST THING TO DO UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. IN MY OPINION TO ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE PEACE CORPS A COST EFFECTIVE OPERATION BY DEMANDING FINANCIAL INPUTS FROM THE HOST COUNTRY MISSES THE POINT OF WHY THE PEACE CORPS IS HERE. THE PEACE CORPS SHOULD BE A SIGN OF OUR COMMITMENT TO RAISE THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF THE POOR. TO ASK A POOR COUNTRY TO CONTRIBUTE SUBSTANTIALLY TO A RICH COUNTRY IN EXCHANGE FOR A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM THAT BENEFITS OUR COUNTRY AS WELL AS THE HOST COUNTRY STRIKES ME AS ANOMALOUS.

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